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HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATIONS AND REPORTS OF SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS AND REPRESENTATIVES

The situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the members of the General Assembly and the Security Council the report on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia prepared by Mr. Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, in accordance with Commission resolution 1992/S-1/1 of 14 August 1992 and Economic and Social Council decision 1992/305 of 18 August 1992.

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. Grave and massive violations of human rights continue to occur in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The military conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is aimed at achieving "ethnic cleansing", remains a matter of particular and most urgent concern. Consequently, and in accordance with resolution 1992/S-1/1 of the Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur has decided to prepare the present periodic report in order to draw the attention of the Commission on Human Rights, as well as the Security Council, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and all Governments and concerned international organizations, to the most compelling problems associated with the policy of ethnic cleansing. A more comprehensive report containing the findings to which reference is made in this report and a further analysis of the situation prevailing in the former Yugoslavia will be submitted to the General Assembly at its present session.

2. The Special Rapporteur carried out a second mission to the territory of the former Yugoslavia during the period 12-22 October 1992. a/ The testimony he received confirms that serious and widespread human rights violations continue to occur. The second mission included visits to different areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia, including Kosovo, Vojvodina and Sandjak. Special attention was given to prisons and refugee centres. The Special Rapporteur interviewed victims of human rights violations and received material which describes in detail the extent of these violations. The programme of the mission is attached as appendix I to the present report.

3. At the invitation of the Special Rapporteur, the following Special Rapporteurs, Representatives and Experts took part in the mission: Mr. Bacre Ndiaye, Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; Mr. Peter Kooijmans, Special Rapporteur on the question of torture; Mr. Louis Joinet, Chairman of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention; Mr. Francis Deng, Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons. In this way it was possible during the mission to operate in parallel groups and visit more places of concern. Two medical and forensic experts, Dr. Clyde Snow b/ and Dr. Jack Geiger, also took part in the mission, along with substantive staff from the United Nations Centre for Human Rights, as well as United Nations interpreters.

4. The local authorities permitted the Special Rapporteur to visit freely different places of interest during his mission, with one exception when members of the mission were not allowed entrance to the Serbian-controlled territory in the Bosanski Novi-Prijedor region.

5. As a result of this mission, the Special Rapporteur wishes to emphasize strongly that, since his first visit in August 1992, widespread and serious human rights violations continue to be committed in Bosnia and Herzegovina and, in certain respects, have intensified. These violations are being perpetuated at the very time the parties are entering into commitments at the

negotiating table at Geneva. As a result of those violations, a great number of people are suffering and have lost their lives. Thousands more find their lives threatened and their human dignity violated. Unless immediate action is taken, many of them will not survive the coming winter. As indicated in the first report, the Muslim population are the principal victims and are virtually threatened with extermination.

II. OBSERVATIONS CONCERNING THE SITUATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AREAS VISITED

6. The Special Rapporteur shares the view of other observers that the principal objective of the military conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the establishment of ethnically-homogenous regions. Ethnic cleansing does not appear to be the consequences of the war, but rather its goal. That goal, to a large extent, has already been achieved through killings, beatings, rape, destruction of houses and threats. Such practices have intensified in recent weeks and there is less and less resistance on the part of the non-Serbian population, increasing numbers of whom are ready to abandon everything and to flee their homeland. Recent events observed in the region of Prijedor, Doboj and Kotor Varos prove that Serbian leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not ready to desist in their plans. The Muslim and Croatian populations, in the territory controlled by Serbian authorities, live under enormous pressure and terror. Hundreds of thousands of people are being forced to leave their homes and to abandon their belongings in order to save their lives.

7. During his mission, the Special Rapporteur learned of two instances of resistance to this policy - both unsuccessful. The inhabitants of the Muslim village of Mahovliani sought to avoid forced displacement by demonstrating their loyalty to the local Serbian authorities, including the surrendering of weapons and the acceptance of military service when called. Despite this, they are under constant attacks by "unknown perpetrators". The inhabitants of Vesici, in the Kotor Varos region, opted for armed resistance. The Special Rapporteur intervened personally with Mr. R. Karadzic, leader of the Serbs of Bosnia, in an effort to prevent the massacre of the estimated 70 families living in Vasici.

8. A very dramatic situation was observed in the region of Travnik, where a great number of displaced Muslims live in extremely difficult conditions. The city of Travnik, with a population of 19,000, has had to accommodate more than 14,000 displaced persons. Many of them told the Special Rapporteur that both local authorities and an "emigration agency" in Banja Luka organized their displacement, and that some of them had paid a fee of up to DM 300 per person to leave for a Muslim-controlled territory. They were driven towards the front line, but were obliged to leave the bus several kilometres before reaching it and to cross the combat zone as best they could. En route they were repeatedly beaten, robbed, subjected to various forms of harassment, and, in some cases, raped or shot.

9. The continued fighting in the region of Travnik is threatening the safety of those persons and is endangering the delivery of humanitarian aid. The Special Rapporteur travelled on what was then the only usable road from Split, on the Croatian coast, to Travnik and Zenica in Central Bosnia, which has become known as the "Salvation Road". This road is extremely narrow, mountainous and dangerous, and will be impassable with the first snow. Those who drive humanitarian convoys along this road deserve admiration and respect.

10. The Special Rapporteur was particularly shocked by the conditions in Trnopolje camp, where persons hoping to flee ethnic cleansing by Serbs have gathered. More than 3,000 people were cramped into three buildings and a few small houses, where they live in unspeakable squalor, sleeping on thin blankets and lice-infested straw, drinking contaminated water and surviving on minimum rations of bread. Some of those persons have remained in this camp for more than four months. The physician accompanying the Special Rapporteur stated that upper respiratory infection was spreading like wildfire. Children and adults were suffering from diarrhoea, presumably from contaminated water and a near-total absence of sanitation. There sre diabetics without insulin, heart patients without digitalis, and persons suffering from hypertension without medication.

11. Trnopolje was described by the local authorities as an open camp. However, conditions in the surrounding areas, where virtually all houses belonging to Muslims and Croats were destroyed, are such that these prisoners could only move at great risk for their lives. Even within the camp they feel threatened by the militia guarding the camp.

12. Similarly appalling conditions are believed to be found also in a number of other smaller centres throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. According to the medical experts, a public health disaster that will drawf the number of victims of mass executions and of the military conflict is already under way.

13. The majority of the displaced persons can only save their lives by seeking refuge outside the borders of Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, Croatia, which already has some 300,000 displaced citizens and 400,000 Bosnians, maintains that it is not in a position to receive more refugees, since the refugee centres and hospitals are overloaded. For that reason, UNPROFOR, which controls much of the border between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, is being forced to limit their entry into the United Nations Protected Areas (UNPAs). Many displaced Muslims have been turned away at the border and some of those persons who have already crossed it, including those of military age, are being sent back both by UNPROFOR and the Croatian authorities. It is extremely regrettable that UNPROFOR has been forced to violate the principle of <u>non-refoulement</u>. The Special Rapporteur intervened with representatives of the Government of Croatia requesting that they avoid sending refugees eligible for military service back to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

14. Better conditions were found in refugee centres in Croatia and Serbia. The Special Rapporteur also found that displaced persons of Serbian origin are living in Banja Luka in much better conditions. During the meeting with the Special Rapporteur, they reported to have been subjected to various forms of atrocities in their places of origin.

15. During his mission, the Special Rapporteur devoted much attention to the problem of persons detained as a result of the conflict. Serbian prisoners interviewed in Mostar did not complain of ill-treatment on the part of prison staff. However, they complained that they are not permitted to walk in the prison grounds, or see their spouses, who are in the same prison. The Serbian prisoners in Zenica complained that, in the absence of the commander, some of them were beaten by the guards. In Tomislavgrad, an elderly Serbian prisoner showed the Special Rapporteur the bruises left by a severe beating received several days earlier. In those cases, the Special Rapporteur requested the competent authorities to respect fully and guarantee the rights of the detainees. A camp containing approximately 1,000 Muslim prisoners was visited in Batcovic, in north-eastern Bosnia. The prisoners did not complain of ill-treatment and, in general, appeared to be in good health. However, they sleep on straw bedding on the floor of a cavernous unheated stable, where living conditions will become intolerable as the cold weather arrives. The most common complaint of the majority of prisoners in all the prisons and camps that were visited is that they do not know the reason for their detention.

16. During his meeting with Mr. Mate Boban, leader of the Croats of Herzegovina, the Special Rapporteur requested that he keep the commitment to free all prisoners made in previous negotiations at Geneva. Mr. Boban confirmed his willingness to free all detained persons except those accused of war crimes. The Special Rapporteur hopes that all sides will fulfil their obligations in that regard. There appears to be a risk that the notion of war crimes will be interpreted in an arbitrary manner. The Special Rapporteur believes that it would be necessary to ensure the presence of international observers during any legal proceedings.

17. During the visit to Sarajevo, representatives of religious communities, authorities and non-governmental organizations confirmed the option that Sarajevo was a "dying city". The population is desperate. Cases have been reported of people dying in the streets from hunger and exhaustion. They are losing confidence in the effectiveness of international assistance. As in other regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, sacred sites are being attacked. The residence of the Muslim religious leader was hit by a rocket and the constant shelling of the city is terrorizing the population. The delivery of humanitarian aid is extremely difficult. However, only an immediate cease-fire can save the population of Sarajevo, as well as that of other besieged cities, from extermination. The extraordinary commitment of all those involved in humanitarian convoys and airlifts, as well as the soldiers of UNPROFOR, must be noted with gratitude.

18. During his visit to Croatia, and on the basis of the testimony of witnesses from Vukovar, Dr. C. Snow, a forensic anthropologist, located a site near Vukovar which appears to be a mass grave of victims of war crimes. A statement prepared by Dr. Snow is attached as appendix II to the present report. After having received Dr. Snow's report, the Special Rapporteur asked the Commander of UNPROFOR immediately to place the site under surveillance, and requested the Secretary-General to provide permanent protection of the scene through UNPROFOR. Since information has been received of the existence of other mass graves in this and other areas, the Special Rapporteur considers that the Secretary-General should, either directly or through his Representative to the London Conference, warn all the parties to the conflict in the former Yugoslavia of the seriousness of any interference with such graves or other evidence of war crimes.

19. In connection with Security Council resolutions 771 (1992) and 780 (1992), in which the Secretary-General is requested to establish a Commission of Experts to examine and analyse information related to violations of humanitarian law, including war crimes, the Special Rapporteur believes that further investigations concerning the discovery in Vukovar should be carried out within the mandate of this Commission. In particular, there is an urgent need to establish a group of experts on forensic science and anthropology in order to conduct an in-depth examination of this site.

20. The Special Rapporteur considers the current situation in Kosovo to be dangerous. The local Serbian authorities accuse the ethnic Albanian leaders of organizing a boycott against Serbian authorities and institutions. The Albanian leaders, as well as representatives of the Muslim and Catholic communities in Kosovo, provided the Special Rapporteur with evidence of discrimination against ethnic Albanians and human rights violations in Kosovo. Shortly before his visit, police attacked a demonstration, which had been legally authorized, without warning. The Special Rapporteur on the question of torture received evidence of the brutal beating of several people during that incident. Discrimination in education and employment is dramatic. Ethnic Albanians have been almost entirely eliminated from public service, the administration of justice and health care institutions. That discriminatory policy is also reflected in laws and in measures which have been taken with a view to undermining Albanian culture. The continued deterioration of living conditions results in the emigration of the younger population from Kosovo.

21. There is hope that the initiative taken by the Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Mr. Milan Panic, with a view to establishing a dialogue between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, may produce positive results. In a meeting with the Special Rapporteur, Mr. Panic expressed his desire to stop human rights violations and discrimination against Albanians. He also agreed to the suggestion of the Special Rapporteur that the media should not exacerbate tensions in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The approach of Prime Minister Panic is, however, violently rejected by Serbian extremist groups, which are also active in Kosovo. Although the prevailing attitude of

most ethnic Albanian leaders at the present time is prudent and patient, there is also a potential for violence by radical Albanian groups. A large number of Yugoslav troops are stationed in Kosovo. Pristina, the regional capital, has the appearance of a city under martial law.

22. While the Special Rapporteur was in Kosovo, the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons visited Vojvodina. At present the information received indicates that the practices associated with ethnic cleansing are occurring with some regularity, although, thus far, on a much smaller scale than in Bosnia. Non-Serbs in Vojvodina have been purged from many public positions, including the police, the courts and public administration. Some sources give the number of Croats and Hungarians who have fled as 90,000, while the number of refugees who have come to the region has been estimated at 150,000. Hungarians, Croatians, Slovaks, Slovenes, Ukrainians and other minorities fear that the refugees may be settled permanently, confiscating the property of other ethnic groups and weakening their political and cultural autonomy. The economic difficulties posed by the influx of refugees, aggravated by the effects of the economic embargo and poor harvests, contribute to resentment against the largely Serbian refugee population. In general, the situation is tense and there appears to be a tangible risk of a substantial increase in violence during the winter months.

23. During the mission, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions visited Sandjak. It was found that the region, which is inhabited by a Muslim and Serbian population, is a potential place of conflict. Despite the apparent atmosphere of tolerance in Novi Pazar, the capital of the region, some incidents against members of the Muslim community have been reported. In the region bordering Bosnia and Herzegovina, classical methods of ethnic cleansing are employed. Houses pertaining to Muslims have been burned and mosques destroyed by terrorist attacks in the cities of Pljevlja, Prijepolje and Priboj. The presence of various military and paramilitary groups in the area, owing to the proximity of the conflict in Bosnia, has increased the sense of insecurity afflicting the Muslim population. An estimated 70,000 Muslims are reported to have left the region since the beginning of the conflict. While many Muslims and Serbs continue to live together peacefully in Sandjak, and while the local authorities also show signs of tolerance, an outburst of violence due to the attitudes of the military, the authorities of the Republic of Serbia or certain political leaders cannot be ruled out.

24. During this mission, the Special Rapporteur had numerous meetings with leaders of Islam, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches and the Jewish community. Those meetings confirmed his conviction that, despite appearances, the present conflict is not a religious one. The Special Rapporteur believes that the religious communities can and should play an important role in overcoming the mutual hatred and in creating conditions for future coexistence. Consequently, the Special Rapporteur has proposed that the highest authorities of all the religious communities call for a common day of prayer for human dignity, human rights and peace. He is convinced that such an initiative would serve all the peoples of the region.

III. CONCLUSIONS

25. The Special Rapporteur reconfirms his recommendations as formulated in the first report. He would like, in the present report, to draw attention to the most urgent problems, which require prompt action.

(a) The war-torn situation in which tens of thousands of people have found themselves requires emergency action by the international community. Safe havens abroad must be found for those whose lives are in acute danger (such as persons detained in camps or trapped in places like Trnopolje). The argument that providing refuge for such people is to conform to the policy of ethnic cleansing cannot override the imperative of saving their lives. Priority must be given to the protection of the right to life. Thus far, European countries have agreed to provide refuge to only a small percentage of those whose lives are at stake. In order to ensure that providing refuge will not contribute to ethnic cleansing, it is essential to reaffirm and provide lasting protection for the right to return. The Special Rapporteur once again appeals to Governments to take urgent steps and to international public opinion to support those efforts. In that regard it is essential that prompt and adequate responses be given to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross in their efforts to find solutions for these most serious situations;

(b) A large number of displaced persons would not have to seek refuge abroad if their security could be guaranteed and if they could be provided with both sufficient food supplies and adequate medical care. In this context the concept of security zones within the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina should be actively pursued. The Special Rapporteur urges Governments to bring pressure to bear on all parties to the conflict with a view to respecting the safety of the civilian population;

(c) Given the dramatic nature of the current situation, the Special Rapporteur calls for an increase in humanitarian assistance to all persons in the affected areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina and urges Governments to provide UNHCR with additional support;

(d) The Special Rapporteur also considers that the efforts aimed at opening humanitarian relief corridors to all besieged areas in Bosnia and Herzegovina should be given priority attention.

Notes

a/ For the report of the first mission, see A/47/418-S/24516.

b/ For the statement by Dr. Clyde Snow, see appendix II below.

APPENDIX I

Programme of the second visit of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the territory of the former Yugoslavia (12-22 October 1992)

Monday, 12 October 1992

Arrival at Zagreb.

Meetings of the Special Rapporteur with the President of Croatia.

Meetings with UNPROFOR, UNHCR and ICRC.

Meetings with human rights and opposition groups.

Tuesday, 13 October 1992

Visit of the Special Rapporteur to Split.

Meetings with representatives of UNHCR and ECMM.

Visit to Mostar military prison.

Meeting in Grude with Mr. Mate Boban.

Visit to a refugee centre in Posusje.

* * *

Visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to a refugee centre in Karlovac, Croatia.

Meetings with UNHCR.

Meetings with former detainees.

Wednesday, 14 October 1992

Visit to Tomislavgrad.

Meetings with Serbian detainees.

Visit to Travnik (via Salvation Road).

Meetings with the Mayor and other local authorities.

Visit to a refugee centre.

Meeting with the Mufti of Travnik.

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Visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to a refugee centre in Varazdin, Croatia.

Thursday, 15 October 1992

Visit to Zenica prison to meet with Serbian detainees.

Friday, 16 October 1992

Arrival at Belgrade.

Meetings of the Special Rapporteur with the Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Meetings with the Federal Minister of Human Rights and Minorities and the Federal Minister of Justice.

Meetings with the Chief of staff of JNA.

Meetings with the Deputy Patriarch and other dignitaries of the Orthodox Church.

Meetings with human rights and opposition groups.

* * *

Meetings of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary and arbitrary executions, the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture and the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons with UNHCR and ICRC, and with human rights and opposition groups.

Saturday, 17 October 1992

Visit of the Special Rapporteur and the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture to Pristina, Kosovo.

Meetings of the Special Rapporteurs with CSCE observers and UNHCR.

Meetings with the Pristina District executive and local authorities.

Meetings with Albanian political and community organizations.

Visit of the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture to the prison of Pristina.

* * *

Visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions to Novi Pazar, Sandjak.

Meetings with local authorities and representatives of non-governmental organizations in Novi Pazar.

Meetings with leaders of Muslim and Orthodox communities.

Meetings with leaders of the Sandjak Democratic Alliance.

* * *

Visit of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons to Batcovic and Bijeljina.

Meetings with local authorities.

Visit to Batcovic detention camp.

Visit to the local Red Cross and interviews with refugees.

* * *

Visit of Dr. Snow to Vukovar (until Monday, 19 October 1992).

Sunday, 18 October 1992

Meetings of the Special Rapporteur with the Muslim religious leader, the Catholic Bishop and the representatives of the Albanian Pen Club in Pristina.

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Meetings of the Special Rapporteur on question of torture with Albanian witnesses of human rights violations in Pristina.

* * *

Visit of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons to Vojvodina.

Meetings with the Mayor of Sabotica, local authorities, and minority groups in Subotica.

Meetings with CSCE representatives.

Visit to a refugee centre in Backa Topola and meetings with the local Red Cross.

Monday, 19 October 1992

Meetings of the Special Rapporteur in Zagreb with the Catholic Auxiliary Bishop.

Meetings with the Minister without Portfolio competent for media questions and the Minister of the Interior.

Meetings with the Roundtable with Croatian journalists.

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Visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture and the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons to Vukovar.

* * *

Visit of the Chairman on the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention with UNPROFOR officials in Zagreb.

Tuesday, 20 October 1992

Visit of the Special Rapporteur and the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons to Banja Luka and Trnopolje.

Meetings with ICRC and UNHCR officials in Banja Luka.

Visit to Trnopolje camp (Muslim and Croats).

Visit to a Serbian refugee centre in Banja Luka.

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Visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture to a refugee centre in Zagreb.

* * *

Meeting of the Chairman of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention with UNPROFOR officials in Zagreb.

* * *

Meeting of the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons with the Director of the Croatian Office for Refugees and Displaced Persons.

Wednesday, 21 October 1992

Visit of the Special Rapporteur and the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons to Sarajevo.

Meetings of the Special Rapporteur with members of the Presidency and Government of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Meetings with Muslim and Catholic leaders, members of the Jewish community and representatives of non-governmental organizations.

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Visit of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture to Dvor (UNPAs-North) and meeting with UNPROFOR officials.

* * *

Visit of the Chairman of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention to UNPAs-South and meeting with UNPROFOR officials.

Thursday, 22 October 1992

Meetings with the UNPROFOR Force Commander in Zagreb and the UNPROFOR Deputy Head of Mission.

Meetings with Cardinal Kuharic.

The Special Rapporteur held a press conference.

Return to Geneva.

APPENDIX II

Statement by Dr. Clyde Snow

During the course of the mission, members of the delegation met with UNPROFOR Civilian Police (UNCIVPOL), who provided information on several mass graves in the Vukovar area, some of which contain victims of atrocities. On 18 and 19 October 1992, Dr. Clyde Snow, in his capacity as forensic expert, inspected a site located in an isolated wooded area about 2 km south-east of the farming village of Ovcara, near Vukovar. Scattered on the surface of a 10 x 30 m area of disturbed earth were the remains of young adult males bearing skeletal signs of perimortem trauma. In the opinion of the expert, those skeletons appear to be eroding out of a mass grave, which may contain many more bodies.

That discovery is significant because it appears to confirm witness evidence bearing on the disappearance of about 175 patients from the Vukovar Hospital during the evacuation of Croatian patients from that facility on 20 November 1991. At that time, the hospital held several hundred civilian and military patients - both Serb and Croat - most of whom had been wounded in the heavy fighting in and around Vukovar during the preceding months. When the hospital was occupied by Serbian forces in mid-November, both sides agreed that the 420 Croatian patients should be evacuated to Croatian-held territory. According to that plan, the evacuation was to be monitored by representatives of the European Community Monitoring Mission and the International Committee of the Red Cross. Most of the patients - primarily women, children and the elderly - arrived safely in Croatia.

According to statements made by witnesses, however, the lightly wounded civilian and military males were separated from the rest and boarded on Yugoslav National Army (JNA) buses near the hospital. The buses, each containing about 60 prisoners and two JNA guards, were driven to the JNA barracks in Vukovar at about 11 a.m. At 1400 the buses proceeded to Ovcara, where the captured were transferred to a large building used as a garage for farm equipment and vehicles. While moving from the buses to the buildings, they were beaten with a variety of blunt instruments by JNA soldiers and Serbian paramilitaries. The beatings continued for several hours inside the building. At least two men were beaten to death.

It was further reported that, at about 1800, the prisoners were divided into groups of about 20 men. One by one, each group was loaded onto a truck and driven away. At intervals of about 15 to 20 minutes, this truck returned empty and another group was loaded onto it. According to testimony collected, the truck left the building and turned onto a paved road to Grabovo, a village about 3 km south-east of Ovcara. A few minutes later, the truck made a left turn onto a dirt road, which ran between a cultivated field on the left and a heavily timbered area on the right.

From the given estimates of time and distance between the building where prisoners were being held and from the description of the roads used, only one location fits the description: the dirt road turning off the main road at 1.1 km south-east of the Ovcara complex. That road runs north-east, between a cultivated field on the left and a heavily wooded ravine on the right. The area where the skeletons were discovered is located at the head of that ravine, at 0.8 km from where the field road turns off the main road.

After the discovery was made, UNPROFOR authorities took immediate action to ensure round-the-clock security of the scene until a proper medico-legal investigation of the site can be conducted by an international team of forensic experts.

The mission has also received information concerning the possible existence of mass graves in other areas, and further investigations will be carried out in the future.